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The American Institute of Sacred Literature

BIBLE STUDY SUNDAY

This may seem an early date to present a reminder of Bible Study Sunday, since the day is yet four months distant (September 15). But three of these months are the vacation period, when pastors and church members are scattered. Moreover, many of the ministers who observed this day in 1906 suggested that we "begin the campaign earlier."

What, then, are some of the reasons for adding another to the many days already observed by the church? First, the church as a whole is facing a new problem, or rather is coming to a new realization of an old problem, and of the methods by which it must be solved. It has tried persecution and the sword; it has tried the catechism and the rod; it has tried emotional evangelism. It is now about to try education, not to displace evangelization, but to supplement it and make it more rational. As in all forward movements, some are more alive to the situation than others; some are more ready to take advantage of the best means of solving its problems than others; but there are few indeed that are not in some measure affected by the revival of interest in, and perception of, the value of religious education.

It is as an agency for developing and directing this interest that Bible Study Sunday has been found useful. Those pastors who have made use of it have testified heartily to its helpfulness and effectiveness. But, so far as our records indicate, only about twenty-five hundred pastors have in any given year used it. In view of the limited campaign of previous years, this is encouraging; but when we consider the number of churches in the country (about 117,000) and the usefulness of the day where it has been observed, we are warranted in desiring and seeking a much more general observance of it. With all the growth of interest in religious education in general, and in Bible study in particular, there is ample need of a campaign on behalf of Bible Study Sunday, which shall tend greatly to increase the number of pastors and churches which will recognize the importance of such study as a means of developing and fostering religious life within the church and community, and the value of this method of bringing about such study.

In the second place, in every community there are associated with the church persons of varying types of mind. There is especially prominent at this time a class of persons who are conscientiously giving their lives to

works of charity and mercy, who are apostles of the great social reformers, and who frankly suggest that the church, and the Christian religion as represented by it, are not broad enough to accomplish the work demanded by present-day civilization. It is well that such persons should occasionally be reminded that the source from which, as matter of historical fact, came the impulse to all this philanthropic work, is the Bible, and pre-eminently the life and teaching of Jesus Christ; and that the greatest stimulus to such work today is furnished in the intelligent study of the Bible. It is well to study men, but it is Jesus who taught us the value of men. The chief impulse to save and help men has sprung from the religion of the Bible.

Third, in many churches ministers and people do not stand together on certain problems. The minister may be progressive, but have a very conservative church; or the people of the church may be progressive and possess great educational possibilities, but be ministered to by a preacher who prefers trodden paths, and shuns the labor of solving difficulties.

Now, nothing is so likely to bring pastor and people to see eye to eye, as studying the Bible together. The observance of Bible Study Sunday, and the inauguration of a campaign for Bible study, issuing perhaps in a Pastor's Bible Club, will contribute, as few other things can, to harmonious thought and action.

Again, the spirit of inquiry is abroad in the land, sometimes to a greater extent than the minister himself is aware. People are seeking information and guidance which those alone can give who have studied the subject, and have found the great fundamentals of the Christian faith, not only undisturbed, but made stronger, by modern methods of Bible Study. Bible Study Sunday furnishes an opportunity for special recapitulation of present-day positions and reinforcement of old truths. Rumors have disturbed the faith. It remains with the minister to restore it on broader foundations, capable of continual growth and expansion.

As an object-lesson to the children of the church, Bible Study Sunday has its special message. School, study, work, all begin with the child after the summer vacation. Then is his true New Year. He will regard his Sunday-school work as a more important function if it also has an annual beginning in which he sees, not himself and his comrades alone, but his parents preparing to take up the study of a special book—a book from whose pages they expect to receive instruction in the art of daily living. Let the Rally Sunday for the children, therefore, include the larger purpose of a Bible Study Sunday for all, with its possible results in organized classes.

Last, for the sake of the community outside the church there is value in Bible Study Sunday. The voice of the church for long periods does not carry beyond its own doors so far as the use of the Bible is concerned, but a concerted movement of the churches in any given community, to make prominent in song, sermon, and prayer the Bible as history, as literature, as a guide of life, will produce an impression which will be felt in the neighborhood and will arouse a curiosity and interest which may lead to investigation, on the part of those who have failed to recognize the Bible as a book of culture, as well as the inspiration of the Christian faith.

In short, whatever attracts attention to the Bible in a favorable way, whether for culture or for religion, is in the line of progress. Bible Study Sunday attracts such attention. Can any conscientious minister decline to lend his name and his influence to a movement which gives him a special opportunity to set the claims of the Bible before his people in a forceful way, at an opportune moment, with the added stimulus which comes from the idea of concerted action, upon a given day, throughout the world? There is no limit to the power of this combined action under the blessing of the church and its Head.

If it be asked, "Why does the INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE undertake this work?" the question is answered by the platform of its Council of Seventy:

The Council does not stand for any theory of interpretation, or school of criticism, or denomination; but for a definite endeavor to promote the knowledge of the Word of God as interpreted in the best light of today. . . . The Council is organized on the basis of a belief that the Bible is a unique revelation from God, and it strives in a constructive spirit to investigate the teachings of the Bible and to extend its influence among the people.

It is true that a comparatively small portion of the results of Bible Study Sunday can come to the INSTITUTE in the form of students; but just as a university stands for education, and not for a method of education, so the INSTITUTE stands for a careful, conscientious, interested study of the Bible, and not for a method of Bible study. It has its methods, but they are one among many. The chief work of the INSTITUTE has always been the promotion, not of a method of Bible study, but of Bible study itself. At great expense, therefore, it is justified in carrying on this movement. The question is: Will every minister who reads this page co-operate by immediately sending his own name, and those of as many other pastors as he can secure, to swell the list of those who will observe the day in September, 1907?